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STATE FOR FPC PROGRAM OFFICER ASILAS; R; NEA/IPA; NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PROGRAM EVALUATION: FY-08 FOREIGN PRESS CENTER WORKING
REPORTING TOUR: U.S. 2008 ELECTIONS: U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND
PRACTICES

Summary

11. (U) SUMMARY: In late June and early July, a Kuwaiti journalist participated in the Foreign Press Center (FPC) supported tour, "U.S. 2008 Elections: U.S. Political System and Practices." The intent of this tour was to introduce a Kuwaiti journalist to the American electoral process, as well as to expose her to American domestic issues and American society and culture. The background and cultural knowledge acquired during the tour will help the journalist in future coverage of the upcoming U.S. Presidential elections. END SUMMARY

12. (U) DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: Participation in the Foreign Press Center (FPC) supported tour, "U.S. 2008 Elections: U.S. Political Systems and Practices," of one Kuwaiti journalist from Al-Watan daily, the Kuwaiti Arabic language daily with the largest readership in Kuwait.

13. (U) DATE: June 25 - July 13 FY08 - third quarter

14. (U) JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVE: Kuwaitis read about the United States in their local newspapers on a daily basis. However, the stories largely cover American foreign policy. The tour was intended to allow a local reporter to increase their knowledge and understanding of the American electoral process, American domestic policy, as well as American society and culture. By organizing a tour in three different cities, the tour was able to emphasize the diversity of America and its people.

15. (U) RESULTS/IMPACT: Excellent.

Five articles were published by the journalist, all of which appeared on the front page of her newspaper, Al-Watan. Al-Watan newspaper has the largest readership in Kuwait, and is particularly favored by Kuwaitis because of its emphasis on local news. Articles ranged from interviews with President of the Arab American Institute, James Zogby, as well as an article comprehensively outlining the upcoming electoral process. All articles, except for one, included photographs.

During debrief by IO with the participant, the journalist agreed that her view of the U.S. was changed by the tour. She commented several times on her newfound perspective of America's diversity, both as a country and as a people. The journalist also noted that it was her first time visiting the United States, and that after this initial experience, she hoped to take her family on a vacation to America in the coming year.

Participant also emphasized how important it was for her to meet

Arab-Americans during the tour, and to understand how Arab-Americans fit into American society. The tour began in Washington, DC, and it was there that the journalist was able to meet several prominent Arab-Americans from various non-governmental organizations. One of the values in meeting these individuals, she recounted, was to see how Arab-Americans are involved in the U.S. political process -- in particular in the upcoming U.S. Presidential elections.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, the journalist was able to interact with staffers from the Presidential campaign, as well as campaign volunteers. The journalist also witnessed anti-war protests, and expressed surprise at how openly Americans are able to express dissent towards American policy.

Participant expressed delight at the second leg of the trip, which was to the Miami, Florida area. The group remained on Independence Day, and was able to see an Independence Day Parade. The participants took the opportunity of the parade to also mingle with the locals who had come out to watch the parade themselves. The journalist expressed satisfaction at being able to speak at length with members of both the Hispanic and African-American communities who were attending the parade that day.

Criticisms/negatives: The journalist expressed disappointment at a cancelled appointment by a prominent Muslim politician in St. Paul, Minnesota. The journalist related that the group waited a half an hour for this individual, only to be told by the individual's assistant that the politician was "too busy" to see them on that particular day. This interview would have been an excellent insight into how Americans of Arab origin and of Muslim faith participate in the political process and in public serve.

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16. (U) QUALITY OF USG SUPPORT: The participant expressed her sincere thanks to program officer Algis Silas for a well organized tour and his readiness to assist in all matters. Post adds its accolades for Mr. Silas' outstanding performance in putting together this tour. We look forward to participating in future Foreign Press Center Reporting Tours.

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JONES